

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJ: DEMOCRATIZATION OF CORTES' PARLIAMENTARY WORK

SUMMARY: CORTES HAS ADOPTED CHANGES IN ITS OWN RULES TO ALLOW FOR CAUCUSES BY PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS AND FOR PLENARY DEBATE. GOVT FAVORS STEP AS MEANS OF STREAMLINING WORK OF CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND POLITICAL OBSERVERS SEE IT AS THE START OF A MEASURE OF POLITICAL PLURALISM IN SPANISH PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICES. END SUMMARY

1. THE RULES COMMITTEE OF THE SPANISH CORTES ADOPTED FEB 4, TWO

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PROPOSALS BY CORTES PRESIDENT FERNANDEZ MIRANDA WHICH ALLOW FOR

OFFICIAL SANCTION OF PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS AND FOR PLENARY DEBATE OF GOVT BILLS ON THEIR FIRST READING. GROUPS ARE OBLIGATED TO HAVE A MINIMUM MEMBERSHIP OF 50 -- ALTHOUGH 25 ARE ALLOWED AS A PROVISIONAL MEASURE -- AND MUST DRAFT A PROGRAM OF THEIR OBJECTIVES WHICH, TOGETHER WITH THE MEMBERSHIP, MUST BE PUBLISHED IN THE OFFICIAL RECORD OF THE CORTES. ALSO THE CORTES PRESIDENT NOW MAY DECIDE TO HAVE A PLENARY DEBATE ON A GOVT BILL ON FIRST READING IN THE CORTES RATHER THAN DROPPING IT INTO THE COMMITTEE MORASS WHERE BILLS CAN LANGUISH IN OBSCURITY.

2. ACCORDING TO A MEMBER OF THE REFORMIST "GRUPO PARLAMENTARIO", THE CORTES CHANGES STEM FROM A GOVT INITIATIVE TO STREAMLINE THE FORTHCOMING CONSIDERATION OF CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS. HERETOFORE, GOVT BILLS WERE OFTENTIMES DELAYED BY INDIVIDUAL AMENDMENTS MADE BY A LARGE NUMBER OF DEPUTIES (A RECENT BILL HAD OVER 2,000

VENDMENTS FROM A PARLIAMENT OF 565 MEMBERS). ALTHOUGH THE GOVT COULD USUALLY EXPECT TO HAVE ITS BILLS ADOPTED, THEY WERE OFTENTIMES MANGLED ALMOST BEYOND RECOGNITION IN COMMITTEE. BY ALLOWING FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS OF CAUCUSES, THE GOVT HOPES TO LIMIT THE NUMBER OF INTERVENTIONS BY INDIVIDUAL DEPUTIES AND HAVE POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS AIRED EARLY IN PUBLIC DEBATE RATHER THAN IN THE TOO COZY ATMOSPHERE OF THE COMMITTEES. MANIPULATED BY ENTRENCHED REGIME INTERESTS.

3. THE "GRUPO PARLAMENTARIO", THE FIRST PARLIAMENTARY GROUP TO OPERATE INFORMALLY, COMPRISSES SOME 30 DEPUTIES WHO FIRST GOT TOGETHER IN MAY 1975. ITS MEMBERS REPRESENT SOME OF THE MOST APERTURISTA ELEMENTS IN THE CORTES, INCLUDING THREE FORMER LEADER GRANTEES TO THE U.S. THIS GROUP, WHICH HAS A BASIC COMMITMENT TO A MORE DEMOCRATIC PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM, HAS HAD NO BINDING RULES, BUT IN PRACTICE, HAS SET A PATTERN OF BLOCK VOTING WHICH HAS APPARENTLY SERVED AS THE MODEL FOR THE RECENT CHANGE.

4. SINCE THE ADOPTION OF THE NEW RULES AT LEAST FOUR OTHER EMBRYO PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS HAVE BEEN FORMED. THEY ARE: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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(A) THE PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE NATION MADE UP PRIMARILY OF MEMBERS OF THE CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL ASSOCIATION "ANEPA", (B) A GROUP CONSISTING OF MEMBERS OF SILVA MUÑOZ' CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC "UNION DEMOCRATICA ESPAÑOL" (UDE), (C) A GROUP CONSISTING OF MEMBERS OF THE CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL ASSOCIATION "UNION OF THE SPANISH PEOPLE", AND (D) A GROUP REPRESENTING A NUMBER OF WELL-KNOWN APERTURISTA POLITICIANS.

5. A UDE LEADER AND CORTES DEPUTY, ANDRES REGUERA, HAS PUBLICLY VOICED WHAT MANY OTHER OBSERVERS HAVE SAID IN PRIVATE: THE SANCTIONING OF PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS IS A STEP IN A PROCESS OF POLITICALIZATION OF THE PARLIAMENT WHICH COULD LEAD TO THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN A FUTURE ELECTORAL CONTEST. NONE OF THIS CHANGES THE BASICALLY INREPRESENTATIVE NATURE OF THE CORTES, LARGEY COMPRISED OF MEN SELECTED BY APPOINTMENT AND SECOND-DEGREE ELECTIONS, BUT IT IS PART OF THE PROCESS OF OPENING UP THE SYSTEM AND PART OF THE GOS STRATEGY TO PLACE PRESSURE ON THE RELUCTANT CORTES TO SUPPORT REFORM.

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